

# Understanding

## Teen Dating Violence

### Fact Sheet

2008

Dating violence is a type of intimate partner violence. It occurs between two people in a close relationship. There are three common types of dating violence.

- **Physical**—This occurs when a partner is pinched, hit, shoved, or kicked.
- **Emotional**—This means threatening a partner or harming his or her sense of self-worth. Examples include name calling, teasing, threats, bullying, or keeping him/her away from friends and family.
- **Sexual**—This is forcing a partner to engage in a sex act when he or she does not or cannot consent.

Unhealthy relationships can start early and last a lifetime. Dating violence often starts with teasing and name calling. These behaviors are often thought to be a “normal” part of a relationship. But these behaviors can lead to more serious violence like physical assault and rape.



### Why is dating violence a public health problem?

Dating violence is a serious problem in the United States. Many teens do not report it because they are afraid to tell friends and family.

- 72% of 8th and 9th graders reportedly “date”.<sup>1</sup>
- 1 in 4 adolescents reports verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse from a dating partner each year.<sup>1,2</sup>
- About 10% of students nationwide report being physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 12 months.<sup>3</sup>



### How does dating violence affect health?

Dating violence has a negative effect on health throughout life. Teens who are victims are more likely to do poorly in school. They may engage in unhealthy behaviors, like drug and alcohol use. The anger and stress that victims feel may lead to eating disorders and depression. Some teens even think about or attempt suicide. Victims may also carry the patterns of violence into future relationships.<sup>4</sup> Physically abused teens are three times more likely than their non-abused peers to experience violence during college.



### Who is at risk for dating violence?

Studies show that people who harm their dating partners are more depressed, have lower self-esteem, and are more aggressive than peers. Other warning signs for dating violence include:

- Use of threats or violence to solve problems
- Alcohol or drug use
- Inability to manage anger or frustration
- Poor social skills
- Association with violent friends
- Problems at school
- Lack of parental supervision, support, or discipline
- Witnessing abuse at home



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## How can we prevent dating violence?

The ultimate goal is to stop dating violence before it starts. Strategies that promote healthy relationships are vital. During the preteen and teen years, young people are learning skills they need to form positive relationships with others. This is an ideal time to promote healthy relationships and prevent patterns of dating violence that can last into adulthood.

Prevention programs change the attitudes and behaviors linked with dating violence. One example is Safe Dates, a school-based program that is designed to change social norms and improve problem solving skills.



## How does CDC approach prevention?

CDC uses a 4-step approach to address public health problems like dating violence.

### Step 1: Define the problem

Before we can prevent dating violence, we need to know how big the problem is, where it is, and whom it affects. CDC learns about a problem by gathering and studying data. These data are critical because they help decision makers send resources where they are needed most.

### Step 2: Identify risk and protective factors

It is not enough to know that dating violence is affecting a certain group of people in a certain area. We also need to know why. CDC conducts and supports research to answer this question. We can then develop programs to reduce or get rid of risk factors.

### Step 3: Develop and test prevention strategies

Using information gathered in research, CDC develops and evaluates strategies to prevent violence.

### Step 4: Assure widespread adoption

In this final step, CDC shares the best prevention strategies. CDC may also provide funding or technical help so communities can adopt these strategies.

For a list of CDC activities, see *Preventing Violence Against Women: Program Activities Guide* ([www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/vawguide.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/vawguide.htm)).



## Where can I learn more?

### Choose Respect Initiative

[www.chooserespect.org](http://www.chooserespect.org)

### National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

### National Sexual Assault Hotline

1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

### National Sexual Violence Resource Center

[www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)

### National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center

[www.safeyouth.org](http://www.safeyouth.org)



## References

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2. Avery-Leaf S, Cascardi M, O’Leary KD, Cano A. Efficacy of a dating violence prevention program on attitudes justifying aggression. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 1997;21:11–7.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance—United States, 2007. *MMWR* 2008;57(No.SS#4).
4. Smith PH, White JW, Holland LJ. A longitudinal perspective on dating violence among adolescent and college-age women. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2003;93(7):1104–9.

For more information, please contact:

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